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The Headteacher
Thrybergh Comprehensive School
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Dear Mr Pridding

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THRYBERGH SCHOOL INSPECTION NO 282997

Introduction

Following my visit with Anthony Briggs and Lawrence Denholme, Additional inspectors, to your school on 8 and 9 November, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was placed in special measures in May 2005

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of receipt of this letter.

Evidence

During the visit, 32 parts of lessons, two registration sessions, the exclusion centre and an assembly were inspected. Inspectors scrutinised school documents and sampled pupils' work. We met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, representatives from the local authority and held discussions with senior staff and middle managers in connection with the key issues. In addition, we observed the school at break and lunchtimes. We had informal discussions with a number of teaching and support staff and spoke with pupils.

Context

We acknowledge that the school has seen a considerable amount of change since being placed in special measures. The leadership of the school, both at senior and middle management level has been completely overhauled. The current headteacher only arrived at Easter, and the longest standing member of the senior leadership team has been in post a year. Critically 14 new members of staff started in September, including key appointments to the leadership team, and two newly qualified teachers. The school is also in the middle of a major PFI project rebuilding significant portions of the school. Although the school then moved into the new building in September, the project will not be complete until Easter 2006, and areas of the building are still inaccessible. This has meant that some lessons continue to be taught in temporary accommodation, and this has affected the ability of certain subjects to deliver all aspects of their work. For example in technology, there has been no food preparation as facilities are not available yet. More generally, this has influenced adversely the learning environment that some pupils have had to endure. Inevitably, the new build and reconstruction has caused some disruption, however once completed, levels of accommodation and facilities will be significantly better. Currently the local authority grades the school for the highest level of intervention. It judges that there is no scope for closure of the school at this time.

Achievement and standards

Standards in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are currently well below national averages. In terms of contextual value added measures, data also reveals that at Key Stage 3 pupils are significantly underachieving and, although there has been some improvement, progress at Key Stage 4 is still inadequate overall.

At Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils achieving both Levels 5 and 6 in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are well below national averages. In 2004 and 2005 these subjects failed to meet statutory targets. Boys are performing better in mathematics and science than girls, but there was little gender difference in English. Science has seen an improvement in the number of pupils reaching levels 5 and 6, which is encouraging, but this remains well below average overall.

At Key Stage 4, GCSE results fell virtually across the board, although the numbers of pupils gaining 5 A*-G remained stable and girls significantly outperformed boys. Average pupil scores also fell.

Since being placed in special measures the new school leadership team has taken a number of important actions to challenge the long standing and deep rooted underachievement at the school. These include making better use of the data the school has to maximise the achievement of all groups across the school. This has been reinforced by significant investment in staff development, which is on going. A more differentiated approach to meeting the individual learning needs of pupils is being implemented, but is not yet embedded. Staff are now being given the tools to have a clearer idea of standards and achievements in their areas, allowing them to plan more effectively and appropriately. Working more closely with the primary schools is an important step in addressing the issue of standards and the key appointment of a primary liaison teacher signals the schools commitment. More

rigorous target setting and monitoring and evaluation procedures are additional moves in the right direction. The problem the school has at present is the lack of consistency with which these strategies are being disseminated and utilised across the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- To raise standards and ensure the curriculum is relevant to the needs of pupils - **satisfactory**

Personal development and well-being

The school has made good progress in cultivating pupils' personal development. Assemblies and RE lessons provide a strong basis for the development of pupils' moral, social, spiritual and cultural education. Participation in a wide range of sporting and cultural activities is a key strength of the school.

The school's policies on attendance, behaviour and punctuality are now seen by pupils to be having an effect. Pupils report that they increasingly enjoy their education, and feel secure and comfortable in the improving environment. There is a growing pride in being a pupil at this school, accompanied by a corresponding growth in the confidence and self-esteem derived from achievement in a number of areas.

Inspectors found good improvement in behaviour and attitudes, and in pupils' engagement and behaviour in a number of lessons. However attendance and punctuality are not yet satisfactory. Progress in addressing this issue has been hampered by the previous false representation of attendance data, which is around 80%, not the 90% reported in the PANDA. The school's action to promote good attendance since being placed in special measures has been appropriate, including a new attendance and punctuality policy and trying to engage parents to support the school's determination to improve attendance, and a new electronic registration system. Working with educational welfare officers and employing dedicated attendance staff are all positive steps. However, the full impact of these strategies is not yet apparent and attendance is still inadequate. The school makes sensible use of fixed term exclusions, with appropriate support to secure pupils' re-entry to education.

Support in personal development, careers and PSHE is particularly strong and pupils are well served both in transition to the school and in progression to employment and to further education or training at other institutions. There are good induction arrangements and particularly strong liaison with partner primary schools. Pupils enjoy access to well-informed support, advice and guidance. Additional help and support in numeracy and literacy sustain the development of appropriate workplace skills for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and they make satisfactory progress.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- To improve the pupils' attitudes and their involvement in learning so that they make better progress - **good**

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is broadly similar to that noted in the May 2005 inspection. This is consistent with the school's own evaluation of teaching across the curriculum. The school has put systems in place to remove the weaknesses identified in the last report, but it is too soon for these to have had significant impact. There are pockets of good practice but this is not being shared effectively across the school and the quality of teaching therefore varies considerably both across and within departments.

In the best lessons, teachers use effective question and answer strategies and starter activities well to review and reinforce previous learning, objectives are shared with pupils and lessons end with summaries that effectively consolidate the learning that has taken place. Pupils respond well to this structured learning but it is far from consistent across the school. Relationships are strong and many teachers treat pupils fairly. Consequently, pupils work hard and show a keen interest in their work. Pupils learn the most when they are required to work in small groups or individually to find solutions to problems for themselves. They enjoy lessons that actively involve them in their learning. Some teachers are using the recently installed interactive white boards well to aid learning but it is very early days. However, in too many lessons the above strengths are missing. Teachers often give lengthy introductions to lessons and fail to keep the pupils interested because too much time is spent managing behaviour rather than focussing on how much pupils are learning. Learning objectives are not always clear or shared and pupils do not know what is expected of them or if they are making suitable progress. Too many lessons lack opportunities for pupils to participate fully as individuals or to take the initiative in their learning. Although diminishing, there is still a nucleus of teachers who expect too little from the pupils and are satisfied with and even praise low-level work. Teaching assistants are not used effectively. There is not enough discussion or sharing of planning between teachers and the adults supporting the lessons. New plans to base teaching assistants within particular faculties are beginning to show a positive impact.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- Improve the quality of the teaching – **satisfactory**

The use of assessment to monitor progress has improved and is better at whole school level than within subjects. The school has a great deal of information about pupils' performance, which is a significant improvement. This information is now being used much more effectively to track progress and set targets over the course of the year. More staff now use this information to plan lessons that get the best out

of each pupil. However, the use of assessment is not an integral part of lessons and the increased availability of data have not led to lesson planning consistently matching the needs of all learners. Teachers do not successfully use the performance data to build on pupils' prior learning. This results in some pupils finding work too easy whilst others struggle to complete it. Homework is provided regularly but remains inconsistent in quality and relevance. Marking of work is patchy even within departments. Some teachers give helpful information to pupils but others only tick work without correcting spelling, grammar or general mistakes. Consequently, most pupils still do not know what level they are working at or what to do to get better. Pupils are particularly unhappy that some of their work has not been marked for several weeks.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- Improve the use of assessment to inform pupils' learning and monitor progress – **satisfactory**

At present, the quality of the curriculum is broadly similar to what it was at the last inspection. However, a number of suitable strategies are being introduced. These include a full curricular review, the introduction of a number of new and more appropriate syllabuses and the refinement of transition and vocational arrangements in terms of the choices available and the guidance provided to pupils. These developments are in their early stages and some are progressing more rapidly than others. At this point more work needs to be done on improving the quality of differentiation, provision and target setting for all learners, not just the lower ability pupils. For example, pupils do not generally know what level they are working at, or what it means they can do. Similarly, they are unclear about what they need to do move to the next stage.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- To raise standards and ensure the curriculum is relevant to the needs of pupils - **satisfactory**

Leadership and management

The school's strategy for transforming learning and achievement is grounded in a clear vision and a strong moral purpose. This is matched by a pragmatic approach to improvement which includes clearly defined outcomes, processes for monitoring and evaluation, the use of data in tracking and assessment, and strategies to secure quality control at departmental and classroom level. The Senior Leadership Team deal openly and honestly with continuing weaknesses in their self evaluation, and their understanding of the school's needs is a key factor in the successes achieved to date.

Governors keep in close touch with the school's work. Strong leadership from the Chair of Governors, the structure of sub committees, and the involvement of delegated governors in the day-to-day life of the school all ensure that governors contribute effectively overall to the development of the school. Although supportive of the school, their engagement has not always been sufficiently challenging.

The school is ambitious and keen to learn from best practice. The school's senior leadership is reflective, self-critical and innovative and articulates a clear vision of the school in the future. As a result all staff know what they are working towards. This results in clear strategic thinking and planning for improvement. The creation of strong teams, not only at senior management level but also in faculty and support management, has laid important foundations for progress. Some duplication of functions between teaching and non-teaching staff is being resolved by a growing stress on pupil care, which encompasses both academic and pastoral progress. Pupils note an improvement in their attitudes and motivation as a result of the behavior and support policies the new management team has put into place.

Although day-to-day financial management is sound, the school has accumulated a large deficit. The management and reduction of this deficit could endanger progress and it is important that both the school and the local authority ensure that further progress is built on a sound financial basis.

The management of attendance (which is poor, and a key issue for improvement) has been hampered by inaccurate collection and maintenance of data. In general, however, there is good progress in moving towards the use of electronic data in target setting and the monitoring of achievement, both in respect of individual pupils and in the tracking and analysis of patterns of achievement in departments and among particular groups. The school has identified the need to closely track the gifted and able; children on the cusp of achievement between Grades C and D, and those with specific educational needs.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- Continue to develop leadership and management at all levels - **satisfactory**

External support

Since the school was placed in special measures the local authority have provided a good level of support. The school has been graded for the highest level of intervention and the School Improvement Partner is working very effectively. The school is improving its use of the EAZ initiatives, and has benefited from the collaborative working arrangements in place between Rotherham schools.

The local authority's statement of action is good overall, particularly effective in relation to the investment in personnel to support the school. These include a consultant headteacher, link advisors for each key issue and investment in a continuing professional development programme for support staff. The proposed

actions are clear and specific, with those responsible clearly identified. There are success criteria against which progress will be judged and the authority is well placed to support the school in bringing about the necessary improvements by spring 2007 as required.

A number of pivotal strategies have been introduced to successfully tackle the key issues. At this early stage however their true impact has yet to be felt. It is fair to say, however, that the headteacher and senior managers, with support from the local authority, have sharply focused the efforts of the staff and pupils on whole school improvement.

Main Judgements

- Progress since being subject to special measures is **satisfactory**.
- The quality of the local authority statement of action is **good**.
- Newly qualified teachers **may** be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve attendance and reduce the incidence of poor punctuality and internal truancy.
- Further enhance the quality of in-class support for the full range of learners at the school, so that pupils receive appropriate and challenging activities and tasks in a supportive environment.
- Work with the local authority to stabilise the school's finances, which are currently in deficit, so that there is a reliable structure on which to build ongoing improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Rotherham / Chief Education Officer for Rotherham.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Jones', written in a cursive style.

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector